

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 02668 160324Z
ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
USINT HAVANA

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CASABLANCA FOR REGIONAL FISHERIES ATTACHE

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MR, CU, PFOR, EFIT
SUBJECT: MAURITANIANS SEIZE CUBAN FISHING BOAT

1. SUMMARY: CUBAN FISHING BOAT AND CREW SEIZED NOVEMBER 9 FOR VIOLATIONS OF MAURITANIAN FISHING WATERS, CONTINUE TO BE HELD IN NOUADHIBOU. MAURITANIANS HAVE TENTATIVELY LEVIED 60 MILLION OUGUIYA FINE (APPROXIMATELY 1.3 MILLION DOLLARS) ON TRAWLER. END SUMMARY.

2. ON NOVEMBER 9 MAURITANIAN NAVAL SHIP STOPPED CUBAN FISHING TRAWLER "RIO MAYABEQUE", APPROXIMATELY 25 MILES OFF MAURITANIAN COAST NEAR NOUADHIBOU. AFTER CUBAN TRAWLER DID NOT HEED FIRST MAURITANIAN WARNING TO STOP, MAURITANIAN SHIP FIRED SHOT ACROSS BOW. MAURITANIANS BOARDED TRAWLER, AND THEN ESCORTED IT TO
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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 02668 160324Z

NOUADHIBOU HARBOR WHERE IT REMAINS IN CUSTODY. CUBAN TRAWLER IS IN 6,000 TON RANGE WITH CREW OF 92. MAURITANIANS CHARGED CUBAN TRAWLER WITH THREE VIOLATIONS: (1) TRAWLER DID NOT HALT WHEN FIRST HAILED TO BY MAURITANIAN NAVY; (2) CUBAN FISHING TRAWLER CARRIED NETS WITH MESH OF 60 MILLIMETERS, A MESH TOO FINE BY MAURITANIAN FISHING REGULATIONS, AND (3) MAURITANIANS CHARGE (ON BASIS SHIP'S LOG) THAT CUBAN SHIP ENTERED AND

LEFT MAURITANIAN TERRITORIAL WATERS SEVERAL TIMES DURING JULY 1977 AND THAT TRAWLER WAS FISHING WITHOUT MAURITANIAN LICENSE DURING THESE JULY INCURSIONS INTO MAURITANIAN WATERS.

3. CUBAN CHARGE D'AFFAIRES IN ALGIERS, JORGE CUBILES, FLEW TO NOUADHIBOU END OF LAST WEEK TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS FOR RELEASE OF TRAWLER AND CREW. BECAUSE OF LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES AND HIS LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF MAURITANIAN REGULATIONS, CUBAN REPRESENTATIVE SOUGHT ASSISTANCE OF SPANISH CONSUL IN NOUADHIBOU AND SPANISH EMBASSY IN NOUAKCHOTT. CUBAN CHARGE SPENT NOVEMBER 12-13 AND MORNING OF 14 IN NOUAKCHOTT DISCUSSING SEIZURE WITH MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND WAS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 14 IN NOUADHIBOU.

4. ACCORDING TO SPANISH EMBOFF, CUBAN CAPTAIN STATES HE HAD JUST DELIVERED 200,000 EMPTY FISH-PACKING CASES TO OTHER CUBAN FISHING BOATS AND WAS LYING OFF MAURITANIA FOR RENDEZVOUS WITH ANOTHER CUBAN FISHING BOAT. CAPTAIN STATES THAT RIO MAYABEQUE NORMALLY SUPPLIES CUBAN SHIPS FISHING OFF ANGOLAN COAST WITH PACKING CASES AND OTHER FISHING EQUIPMENT, AND WAS EN ROUTE TO ANGOLA AFTER HAVING BEEN REPAIRED AND TAKEN ON EQUIPMENT IN LAS PALMAS. CAPTAIN CLAIMS CUBAN TRAWLER WAS NOT FISHING. (MAURITANIANS HAVE NOT ACCUSED CUBANS OF FISHING DURING NOVEMBER INCURSION AND ARE IN FACT SUSPICIOUS BECAUSE HOLDS CONTAINED NO FISH.) CUBAN CAPTAIN DECLARED HE DID NOT OBEY INITIAL COMMAND BECAUSE HE DID NOT RECOGNIZE HAILING SHIP AS OFFICIAL MAURITANIAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 NOUAKC 02668 160324Z

PATROLBOAT. SPANISH EMBOFF OBSERVED IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT CREW OF 92 WOULD BE NORMAL FOR 6,000 TON BOAT. SPANISH EMBOFF NOTED THAT PROPOSED FINE OF 60 MILLION OUGUIYAS IS NOT UNUSUALLY HIGH SINCE MAURITANIANS OFTEN PROPOSE 20 MILLION OUGUIYA FINE FOR VIOLATIONS BY SMALL SPANISH FISHING BOATS; AFTER NEGOTIATIONS FINE IS USUALLY SETTLED AT 3-4 MILLION OUGUIYA RANGE).

5. COMMENT: MAURITANIANS REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF PURPOSE OF CUBAN "FISHING" BOAT WHICH HAD NO FISH, MANNED BY OVERSIZE CREW, APPREHENDED CLOSE TO MAURITANIAN SHORE. MAURITANIANS HAVE PERIODICALLY REITERATED BELIEF THAT CUBANS ARE TRAINING AND FIGHTING WITH POLISARIO. THEY HAVE FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT POLISARIO MAY STRIKE FROM SEA. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL CONFIRMED SEIZURE OF CUBAN SHIP AND FACT OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN FISHERIES MINISTRY AND CUBAN REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALGIERS. CUBAN SHIP AND CREW MAY BE IN NOUADHIBOU FOR SOME TIME. KEY GIRM OFFICIALS ARE ABROAD OR PREOCCUPIED WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF SAHARA DISPUTE; JUNIORS CANNOT DECIDE MATTER OF THIS KIND. MAURITANIANS MAY ALSO HOPE TO EXPLOIT CUBAN CONNECTION OF POLITICAL/PR PURPOSES.

HANDYSIDE

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